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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
10 April 1966

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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State Dept. review

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HIGHLIGHTS

Over the weekend of 9 and 10 April, tension in Da Nang and Saigon eased considerably as the Ky government did not implement its decision to send the progovernment marines from the air base into the city. The weekend was characterized, rather, by nonviolent meetings and speeches by the Buddhist Institute, various Catholic groups, and a revitalized non-Buddhist "United People's National Front." A "Buddhist Forces" political party organized by Tri Quang in Saigon has espoused a hard line against the Ky government.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: The lull in military activity continued over the weekend with only one significant ground action reported (Para. 1). Two targets in South Vietnam were bombed by B-52s on 9 April (Para. 2). Operation LINCOLN ended on 8 April. Two new US ground operations, DENVER and MOSBY I, will be initiated tomorrow in provinces bordering Cambodia (Para. 3).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam: Tense Da Nang relaxed as General Dinh went into the city without incident (Paras. 1-2). The civilian pressure groups are unanimous in the desire for a civilian government in the shortest time possible (Para. 3). A "Buddhist Forces" political party is formed (Para. 4). The president of the Saigon Council comments on Buddhist demands (Para. 5). Non-military and non-Buddhist groups declare their desire for civilian government that is pro-American and anti-Communist (Paras. 6-8). Non-Directorate field-grade military officers are irritated by Ky's decision not to use force in Da Nang (Para. 9). The Directorate has decided that Ky is not authorized to negotiate with the Buddhists (Para. 10). Hue and Da Nang were relatively quiet (Para. 11).

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: There is nothing of significance to report.

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IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: Hanoi and Peking continue to hail the unrest in South Vietnam as indicating the inevitability of an eventual US defeat in Vietnam (Para. 1).

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I. MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The lull in military activity in South Vietnam continued over the weekend with only one significant ground action reported. An estimated battalion-size Viet Cong force launched a five-hour night attack against a government Special Forces outpost in Kien Tuong Province southwest of Saigon today. Government casualties were 14 killed and 15 wounded. The enemy lost 40 killed, nine weapons, and a small quantity of documents and medical supplies. A two-company government reaction force was subsequently deployed to ferret out the enemy retreating from the area. At last report heavy contact had been established. One helicopter supporting the reaction force was downed by ground fire.

2. Two targets in South Vietnam were bombed by B-52s on 9 April. Fifteen B-52s attacked a suspected Viet Cong/North Vietnamese division headquarters some 63 miles northwest of Da Nang. Six B-52s struck a major Viet Cong military and political headquarters approximately 95 miles west of Saigon near the Cambodian border.

3. Operation LINCOLN, a major two-week search-and-destroy operation conducted by seven US battalions in Pleiku and Darlac provinces, ended on 8 April. Final results were 450 Viet Cong killed (body count) and 12 captured. Eighty-eight individual weapons and eight crew-served weapons were captured. US losses were 41 killed and 93 wounded. Two new US ground operations are scheduled to begin tomorrow. Two brigades of the US 1st Air Cavalry Division will conduct Operation MOSBY I in Pleiku and Kontum provinces along the Cambodian border. The operation is designed to locate and interdict enemy logistic lines and bases. Farther south, elements of the US 173rd Airborne Brigade will conduct a search-and-destroy operation, designated Operation DENVER, in Phuoc Long Province near the Cambodian border.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Over the weekend of 9 and 10 April, tension in Da Nang and Saigon eased considerably since the Ky government did not implement the 8 April Directorate decision to send the progovernment marines from the air base through the dissidents' road blocks into the city. The 33rd and 35th Ranger battalions were not sent to Da Nang from their bases in III Corps. There were no significant demonstrations in the restive major cities.

2. General Ton That Dinh, the newly appointed I Corps commander, was escorted today, one month after the ouster of General Thi, from the Da Nang Air Base to I Corps headquarters in the city proper without incident. He then called a meeting of the unit commanders and ordered all ARVN units to return to their proper areas. [redacted] the rebel commanders expressed confidence in Dinh's ability to control the situation. One battalion of the marines was flown from the air base to Quang Ngai in USAF C-123 aircraft by orders from Dinh with the approval of General Cao Van Vien, chief of the Joint General Staff.

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3. The weekend was generally characterized by physical restraint in an atmosphere of meetings and speeches on the part of the Buddhist Institute, the Catholics, and a newly created non-Buddhist "United Peoples National Front." Nearly all the civilian groups espoused pro-US, anti-violent, and anti-Communist themes with the primary demand being for an elected civilian government in the shortest time possible. There seems to be no agreement among them, however, on the means with which to best effect the new government; there is general agreement, with one exception, that any forum for discussion, such as the Directorate-sponsored National Political Congress scheduled for this week, would have to be organized by civilians.

4. In Saigon, monks Tri Quang, Thien Minh, Phap Tri, Quang Lien, and Ho Giac held a press conference, elaborating on their three communiqués of

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9 April, which have been interpreted by embassy officials as spelling out a militant hard line, and a virtual pledge of an all-out attack on the Ky government. The executive committee of the newly formed "Buddhist Forces" political party, to be led by Thien Minh and Ho Giac, will inform the press of future demonstrations. Demonstrations are to continue if the government does not comply with the four-point demands, one of which is an elected constitutional assembly in the shortest time possible. It appears that government hopes for a split between the Tri Quang - Tam Chau factions have been temporarily thwarted, although Chau did not appear at a Buddhist press conference today.

5. The president of the Saigon city council, La Thanh Nghe, told the embassy that Buddhist leaders Tri Quang, Tam Chau, and Thien Minh, with whom he talked, are opposed to the National Political Congress and adamant on an elected body to draft a constitution. Nghe feels that their real wish is for the immediate replacement of the present government by a civilian administration which would then organize elections.

6. Several Catholic, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, VNQDD (Nationalist), and Dai Viet groups met this morning in Saigon and formed a new 36-man joint committee of the heretofore largely inactive United People's National Front. The Front read its demands for a civilian government, an end to violence, and a meeting between the Armed Forces Congress and religious and nationalist groups. Embassy officials view the Front as a move by those groups to counteract Buddhist influence both over the government and the proposed National Political Congress.

7. Meanwhile, the Greater Solidarity Force, a refugee Catholic lay organization, issued a manifesto which stated that the first step in achieving democracy and national unification is the establishment of an elected and anti-Communist national assembly. The Force called for government action against corrupt traders, protection of the lives and property of allied military men, and the liquidation of professional troublemakers.

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[redacted]

8. The US Embassy reports that the Catholic University Student Association also adopted a resolution today disapproving violence and calling for the establishment of a democratic government soon. According to FBIS, a press conference held by a Catholic Students Bloc reiterated similar demands and stated further that it supports the convening of the government-sponsored National Political Congress. The two groups may be one and the same.

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9. [redacted] although the Directorate retains its unity, senior and experienced field-grade officers loyal to the government might "sweep the generals out" in the continued absence of action against dissident I Corps and take appropriate action themselves. General Khang of the Directorate has been so informed.

10. At the Directorate meeting on 8 April members agreed that chairman Nguyen Van Thieu is the only person authorized to negotiate with the Buddhists on behalf of the government, thus canceling prior discussions between Ky and Buddhist leaders.

11. Reports of a major Buddhist Demonstration scheduled for today in Saigon did not materialize, and the city has been free of disorders since Friday. Hue and Da Nang were quiet except for periodic anti-government "struggle force" radio statements. The Da Nang radio declared at one point that the US policy of supporting the government is erroneous and if they do not stop intervening the "people will not hesitate to sacrifice their blood to restore self-determination." In Hue, General Nhuan, 1st Division commander, and the Thua Thien Province chief, Khoa, met with General Dinh on 9 April and reportedly gave him their support. [redacted]

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[redacted] Nhuan met with his subordinate commanders also on 9 April and reaffirmed support for the struggle movement.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Hanoi and Peking are continuing to hail the unrest in South Vietnam as indicating the inevitability of an eventual US defeat in Vietnam. The party daily Nhan Dan declared on 9 April that the "so-called" National Political Convention to be convened in Saigon on 12 April is a "farce" and an "ill-conceived US plot" which is doomed to fail. Similarly, the Peking People's Daily on 10 April asserted that the recent developments in South Vietnam provide "fresh proof" that the "rule of US imperialism and its lackeys" in South Vietnam is "fast crumbling" and that the situation of the "liberation struggle" of the Viet Cong is "excellent."

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